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Further Changes In Duxbury

There is no doubt that people have become more homogenized over the years. In the past, Duxbury was made up of definite groups of people: the rich summer people who lived on Powder Point, Washington St. and Standish Shore, the summer people who lived in small cottages within walking distance of the ocean or bay, and the natives. Since commuting to Boston was made a possibility by the construction of the Southeast Expressway, all that has changed.

The rich summer people came to Duxbury to play. They played golf and tennis and they sailed. What else they did with their time I don't know. Though my own parents worked hard, I do not remember hearing a word of criticism from them concerning the life style of the rich. They were "born with a silver spoon in their mouths," an expression that evoked ludicrous images in my young mind and that was that... sort of like "the divine right of kings." They had nursemaids, cooks and chauffeurs and they drove exciting looking cars: Cords, Marmons, Packards; and once in a while an elderly lady would drive by our house, sitting upright in an electric car, going about 15 miles an hour. The natives drove mostly Fords and Chevies.

There were all sorts of ways of telling who was who and where they came from, and there were certain attitudes that even a child became aware of. For instance, about money: if people had had money for several generations it somehow made them more

genteel than if their father had made it. They had become used to having it and knew how to behave, whereas those who had recently acquired it were apt to behave in a show-offy manner. They were called "new rich" and were looked on with suspicion.

I do not remember any resentment toward the summer people by the natives. After all, they paid taxes and didn't have children in school. Also, during the depression it was considered almost an act of grace. There was, however, one time when resentment built up. A plan was afoot to get rid of Powder Point Bridge. The town meeting that year was packed. The summer people drove down from Brookline and Milton wearing raccoon coats, and their "ayes" resounded in the high school. But there weren't enough of them. The bridge was made safe once again by the highway department so there was not further excuse to demolish it.

It wasn't until after World War II that suburbia came into being. Before that time there were city people and country people, and there was not doubt which we were. We were sometimes made aware of it by city people, but I must confess the thought we had heard words like "hick" and "yokel," we mostly felt superior to the city folk who stopped at our farm. They seemed to know nothing about nature or animals or anything basic and important. Once a man confessed, seeing us picking strawberries, that he had always thought strawberries grew on bushes. Another time a well dressed man, driving a big car, stopped to buy eggs. We hadn't gathered them yet that day and he asked if he could come out in the henhouse and watch us. When he saw about 6 eggs in a nest that a hen had just reluctantly left, he remarked to my mother, "I guess that's about all one hen can lay in a day." At first my mother looked at him searchingly to see if he was kidding, then remarked, "Just about."

Another time a father, pointing to a cow's udder, told his young son that that was where milk came from. The boy didn't believe him and kicked him in the shins. Then the boy pointed to the bull and remarked at what a big cow he was. I truly wondered, at that point, if city kids knew anything. We sometimes felt as though we were operating a cross between a museum and a zoo. I suppose our attitude toward city people was much like State of Mainers is today toward "out-of-staters" and Monhegan islanders toward "off-islanders."

Every part of town had at least one "character." Our street had a number of them. They made life more interesting. You could always count on a straightforward answer to any question. They had opinions on everything. They were viewed with tolerant amusement (and perhaps with a bit of envy) for their "chutzpah" by the more conservative members of the community. The gentle joshing that took place in any gathering, including town meeting, is a thing of the past, and it seems, the sense of humor that sparked it.

Clothes have had a lot to do with homogenizing society. In the pre-polyester pant suit period you could tell one grandmother from another. The world wide love affair with blue jeans is an example of people's desire to look alike. There are, of course, subtle differences in their tailoring and styling today. Ours, we used to wear while cleaning out the henhouse, and if they had a label, it no doubt read: "Sears Roebuck" and was sewn on the inside.

So, what seemed to have started with "the man in the grey flannel suit" (and I'm not referring to his clothes) back in the fifties, spread to all towns within commuting distance of a large city, even to Duxbury.

—Priscilla Harris



Red Cross